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ABSTRACT

This nineteenth annual Gallup Poll of public attitudes toward public schools focuses on educational policies of the Reagan Administration, and continues to monitor trends and opinions on questions about schooling. Questions and responses are included for the following categories: (1) Perceived Improvements in Local Public Schools; (2) Perceived Improvement in Student Achievement; (3) Raising Standards; (4) Reporting Achievement for Comparison; (5) Support for Parental Choice; (6) Emphasis on the Basics; (6) Government and the Schools; (7) Character Education in the Schools; (8) School Prayer; (9) Grading the Public Schools; (10) Grading School Personnel; (11) Liberal Arts Degrees for Teachers; (12) Support for Sex Education; (13) Most Important Problems Facing Local Public Schools in 1987; (14) The Public's Knowledge of Local Schools; and (15) The Public's Knowledge of Issues in Education. A description of the research procedure is included and directions are given for ordering copies of the poll. (VM)

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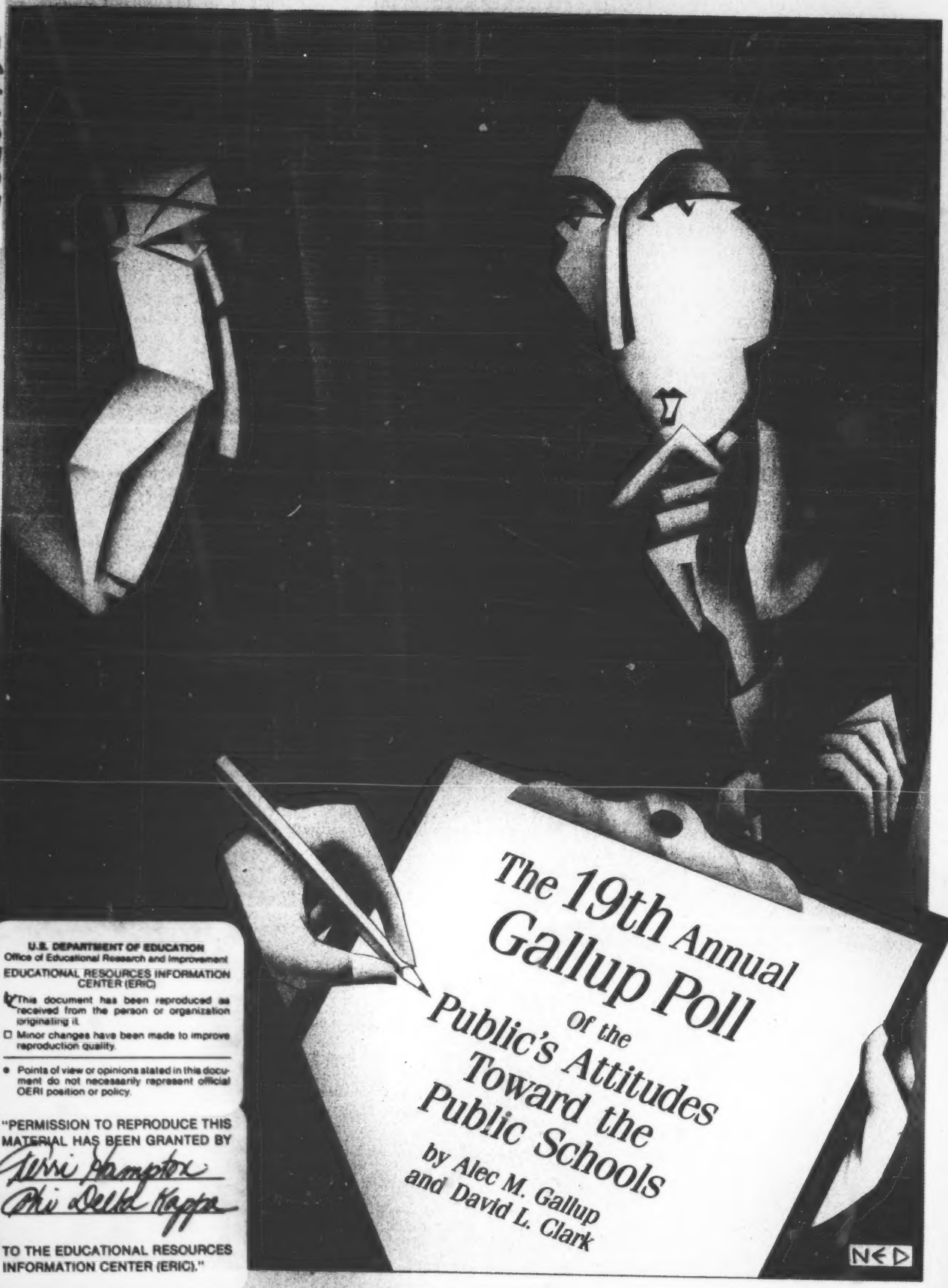

The 19th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

by Alec M. Gallup and David L. Clark

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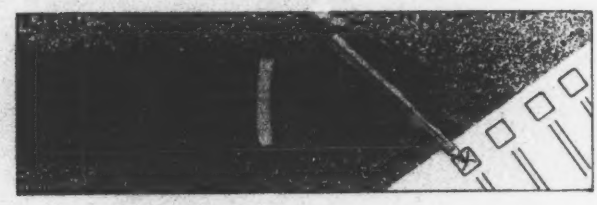
The 1987 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools focuses on educational policies pursued by the Reagan Administration over the past six years. The 19th poll also continues to track trends in opinion on other questions.

Since 1981 federal education policy has changed. For example, federal expenditures for educational programs have been constrained. The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, called for higher school standards and increased competition among schools and students. Passage of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 reduced categorical program aid to schools and increased the influence of state education agencies by making block grants to states. U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett chose as the hallmark for his tenure an emphasis on the "three C's": parental *choice*, *character* education, and the *content* of the curriculum.

As the Reagan Administration nears a close, this survey assesses what the public thinks about the matters the President chose to bring to the country's attention during his years in office.



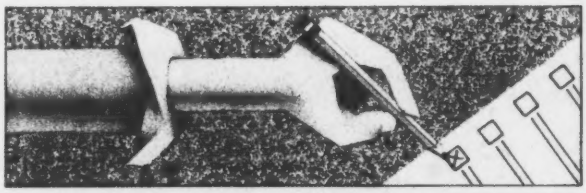
Perceived Improvement in Local Public Schools

In view of the emphasis on education reform since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, respondents were asked whether, in the past five years, the public schools in their community had improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same. In general, the public reported sensing very little overall improvement. However, more public school parents (33%) feel that the public schools have improved than that they have grown worse (21%).

The question:

Would you say that the public schools in this community have improved from, say, five years ago, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improved	25	21	33	26
Gotten worse	22	22	21	23
Stayed about the same	36	36	36	42
Don't know	17	21	10	9



Perceived Improvement in Student Achievement

A plurality of the public believes that, for students of all ability levels, achievement is about the same today as it was five years ago. Public school parents are less likely than nonpublic school parents or respondents with no children in school to believe that student achievement has gotten worse. More public school parents and nonpublic school parents believe that achievement has improved for students of above-average ability than for students of average ability or for students of below-average ability.

The first question:

Compared to five years ago, would you say that student achievement in the local public schools has improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same for students with *above*-average ability?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improved	27	23	34	29
Gotten worse	11	12	10	14
Stayed about the same	41	39	45	38
Don't know	21	26	11	19

The second question:

Compared to five years ago, would you say that student achievement in the local public schools has improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same for students with *average* ability?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improved	19	17	24	29
Gotten worse	14	15	12	15
Stayed about the same	45	42	53	40
Don't know	22	26	11	16

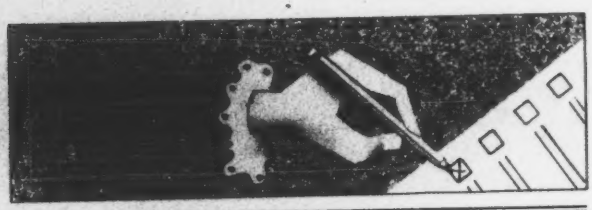
The third question:

Compared to five years ago, would you say that student achievement in the local public schools has improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same for students with *below*-average ability?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improved	20	17	28	23
Gotten worse	22	23	18	26

Illustrations by Ned Shaw

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Stayed about the same	35	32	39	36
Don't know	23	28	15	15



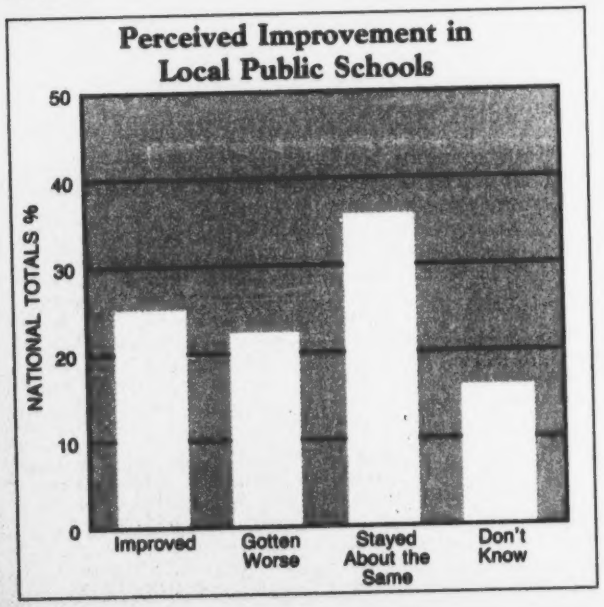
Raising Standards

By stunning margins, the public is confident that raising standards of academic achievement will improve the quality of education. The public feels — by a 7-1 margin — that telling school districts to require higher academic achievement of students will help school quality. Nonpublic school parents are almost unanimous in endorsing this strategy.

The question:

Some school districts have been told that they must require higher academic achievement of their students. Do you think this requirement would help or hurt the quality of the public schools in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Help quality	76	74	79	89
Hurt quality	11	10	13	6
Don't know	13	16	8	5



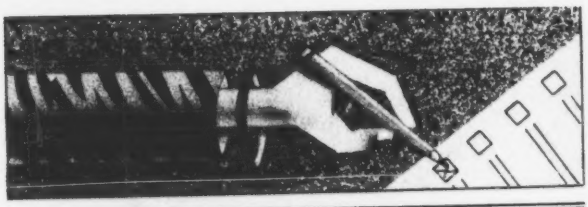
Effect on Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

One in three respondents (30%) expressed some concern about the effect of increased standards of achievement on students from low-income backgrounds. But a clear majority (52%) said that they think such a move will encourage these students to do better.

The question:

Some people say that raising achievement standards will encourage students from low-income backgrounds to do better in school. Others say that raising the standards will put these students at such a disadvantage that they will become discouraged about school or will even drop out. Do you think that raising achievement standards will encourage students from poor backgrounds to do better in school, or will it cause them to become discouraged or to drop out?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes, encourage	52	52	51	60
No, discourage	30	27	37	28
Don't know	18	21	12	12



Reporting Achievement For Comparison

In his 1984 State of the Union Address, President Reagan asserted, "Just as more incentives are needed within our schools, greater competition is needed among our schools. Without standards and competition there can be no champions, no records broken, no excellence — in education or any other walk of life." The public agrees. Seventy percent favor reporting the results of achievement tests by state and by school, so that comparisons can be made. The public feels that such comparisons would serve as incentives to local public schools, whether the results showed higher or lower scores for local students.

The first question:

It is now being proposed that educational achievement test results be reported on a state-by-state and school-by-school basis, so that comparisons can be made between schools of similar size and racial and economic make-up. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	National Totals %	No. Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	70	67	75	78
Oppose	14	13	17	17
Don't know	16	20	8	5

The second question:

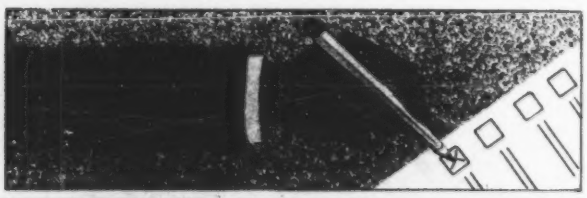
Let's assume that the students in the local public schools received *higher* test results than students in comparable schools elsewhere. Do you think this would serve as an incentive for the local schools to do an even better job or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	72	69	77	76
No	12	12	15	13
Don't know	16	19	8	11

The third question:

Let's assume that the students in the public schools in this community received *lower* test scores than students in comparable schools elsewhere. Do you think this would encourage the local schools to try to do a better job or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	72	69	79	75
No	12	12	12	14
Don't know	16	19	9	11



Support for Parental Choice

President Reagan and Secretary Bennett have pressed consistently for an expansion of parental choice. Respondents were asked about increasing parental choice with regard to the local schools their children attend. Seven of 10 Americans think that parents should have the right to choose. Asked, more specifically, if they would favor a voucher system to enable parents to choose among public, parochial, or private schools, respondents supported the idea by a narrow margin, as they have since 1981.

The lukewarm support for vouchers, in contrast to the public's broad support for choice, seems to stem from a concern that vouchers might hurt the public schools. The public is almost evenly divided on the question of whether a voucher system would hurt (42%) or help (36%) local public schools. Those who feel that a voucher system would hurt local schools are overwhelmingly opposed to vouchers (81% to 7%). Those who think it would help local schools favor vouchers (73% to 16%).

The question:

Do you think that parents in this community should or should not have the right to choose which local schools their children attend?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	71	68	76	81
No	20	20	21	15
Don't know	9	12	3	4

Support for Vouchers

The first question:

In some nations, the government allots a certain amount of money for each child's education. The parents can then send the child to any public, parochial, or private school they choose. This is called the "voucher system." Would you like to see such an idea adopted in this country?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	44	42	49	49
No	41	42	40	46
Don't know	15	16	11	5

NATIONAL TOTALS

	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %	1983 %	1981 %	1971 %	1970 %
Favor	44	46	45	51	43	38	43
Oppose	41	41	40	38	41	44	46
Don't know	15	13	15	11	16	18	11

The second question:

How about the public schools in this community? Do you think the voucher system would help or hurt the local schools?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Help local schools	36	35	38	37
Hurt local schools	42	41	44	49
Don't know	22	24	18	14

	National Totals %	Those In Favor Of Vouchers %	Those Opposed To Vouchers %
Help	36	73	7
Hurt	42	16	81
Don't know	22	11	12

Parental Input on Curriculum, Instructional Materials, and Library Books

No such equivocation exists regarding parental input in setting the curriculum or in the selection of instructional materials and library books. Overwhelmingly, the public feels that parents of public school students should have more (45%) rather than less (8%) to say about the courses that are offered. Thirty-seven percent of respondents feel that parents have about the right amount of say in determining the curriculum.

Despite concerns about censorship, the public also feels that parents should have more, rather than less, influence in the selection of instructional materials (38% to 14%) and in the selection of books placed in school libraries (36% to 16%). Thirty-nine percent feel that the public has about the right amount of say in the selection of instructional materials; 38% feel that the public has the right amount of say in the selection of books for school libraries.

The first question:

Do you feel that parents of public school students should have more say, less say, or do they have about the right amount of say regarding the curriculum, i.e., the courses offered?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
More say	45	40	51	65
Less say	8	10	5	4
Right amount	37	37	41	26
Don't know	10	13	3	5

The second question:

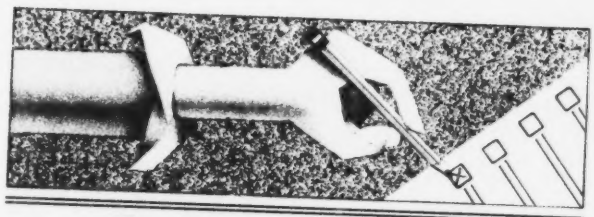
Do you feel that parents of public school students should have more say, less say, or do they have about the right amount of say regarding instructional materials?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
More say	38	36	42	50
Less say	14	15	10	12
Right amount	39	36	46	34
Don't know	9	13	2	4

The third question:

Do you feel that parents of public school students should have more say, less say, or do they have about the right amount of say regarding the books placed in school libraries?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
More say	36	34	40	47
Less say	16	17	11	14
Right amount	38	36	45	33
Don't know	10	13	4	6



Emphasis on the Basics

Few respondents doubt the efficacy of increasing the number of required courses in basic subjects (e.g., math and science), even at the expense of electives. Indeed, three-fourths of the public feel that doing so would improve the quality of the schools. Only 28% of the public feel that elementary schools give enough attention to the three R's. However, nearly half of the public school parents (46%) believe that enough time is given to those subjects in the elementary grades.

For students who plan to attend college, more than 70% of the respondents would require at least five basic subjects: mathematics, English, history, science, and computer training. More than half would require career education, business education, foreign language, and health education. The 1987 poll revealed an increased desire for required core courses for college-bound students since 1985, when this question was last included in the poll.

The respondents also tended to favor increasing the number of required courses for students who do not plan to go on to college. However, there was less agreement on which courses to require. More than 70% of the public would require mathematics, English, and vocational training. More than half would require history, business education, computer training, career education, and science.

At all grade levels, the public is concerned that every student have adequate exposure to and training in the basics. Moreover, the public does not have great difficulty defining what is basic: English and mathematics are basic for all students at all levels; history, science, and computer training are not far behind; vocational, career, or business education is a basic for the non-college-bound student.

The first question:

Some school districts have been told that they must require students to take more courses in basic subjects, such as math and science, thus reducing the number of elective courses students can take. Do you think this requirement would improve or hurt the quality of the public schools in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improve quality	75	74	76	85
Hurt quality	11	9	16	7
Don't know	14	17	8	8

The second question:

Is it your impression that the public elementary schools give enough attention, or not enough attention, to reading, writing, and arithmetic?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Enough	28	21	46	23
Not enough	58	62	47	67
Right amount*	6	6	5	6
Don't know	8	11	2	4

*Those who said "right amount" volunteered that answer.

Required Core Courses

The first question:

Please look over this card, which lists high school subjects. If you were the one to decide, what subjects would you require every high school student who *plans to go on to college* to take?

	For Those Planning to Go to College				
	1987 %	1985 %	1984 %	1983 %	1981 %
Mathematics	94	91	96	92	94
English	91	88	94	88	91
History/U.S. government	84	76	84	78	83
Science	83	76	84	76	76
Computer training	72	71	—	—	—
Career education	63	57	—	—	—
Business education	59	59	68	55	60
Foreign language	56	53	57	50	54
Health education	54	48	52	43	47
Physical education	45	40	43	41	44
Vocational training*	31	27	37	32	34
Music	23	24	22	18	26
Art	23	23	24	19	28

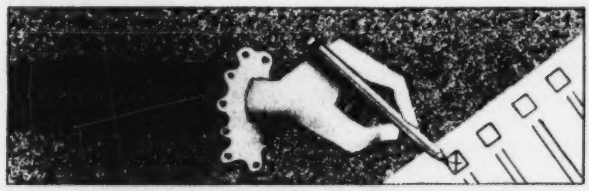
*In 1981 this subject was called "industrial arts/homemaking."

The second question:

What about those public high school students who do *not plan to go to college* when they graduate? Which courses would you require them to take?

	For Those *Not* Planning to Go to College				
	1987 %	1985 %	1984 %	1983 %	1981 %
Mathematics	88	85	92	87	91
English	85	81	90	83	89
Vocational training	78	75	83	74	64
History/U.S. government	69	61	71	63	71
Business education	65	60	76	65	75
Computer training	61	57	—	—	—
Career education	61	57	—	—	—
Science	57	51	61	53	58
Health education	49	43	50	42	46
Physical education	41	40	44	40	43
Foreign language	20	17	19	19	21

"Now I'm just looking for anybody who doesn't stretch the truth."



Government and the Schools

In the September 1984 *Kappan* President Reagan argued that "we must restore parents and state and local governments to their rightful place in the educational process. . . . Decisions about discipline, curriculum, and academic standards . . . shouldn't be made by people in Washington. They should be made at the local level by parents, teachers, and administrators in their own communities." The public agrees. There is no indication that the American people want to cut *any level* of government out of the educational arena.

However, when it comes to government influence in the schools, the people feel that the closer to home the source of that influence is, the better. Asked whether they favor more or less government influence in the improvement of schools, 37% of the respondents favored more federal influence in school improvement, 55% favored more state influence, and 62% favored more local influence. Only at the federal level did a plurality of respondents favor less influence (39% to 37%); at the local level, more than four times as many respondents favored more government influence than favored less (62% to 14%).

In one instance, the public does not favor vesting authority in local government. Asked who should check to determine whether local schools are conforming to the minimum standards set by the state, the public preferred the state by a 3-2 margin. The concern of the public for minimum standards supersedes its concern for local control.

One special issue surrounding the control of schools is what is termed disestablishment, i.e., dismantling the U.S. Department of Education (ED). ED was established near the end of the Carter Administration. Nearly one-fourth of those queried don't know whether they favor disestablishment. The remainder are divided almost equally on the question: 39% favor dismantling ED; 37% would keep ED intact.

The first question:

Would you like the federal government in Washington to have more influence, or less influence, on improving the local public schools? How about the state government? How about the local government?

	Federal Government		State Government		Local Government	
	National Totals %	Public School Parents %	National Totals %	Public School Parents %	National Totals %	Public School Parents %
More	37	41	55	59	62	67
Less	39	42	21	22	15	14
Same amount*	14	10	15	14	15	14
Don't know	10	7	9	5	8	5

*Those who said "same amount" volunteered that answer.

The second question:

In most cases, the state sets the minimum education standards in the local public schools. Who do you think should check to determine how well the local schools are conforming to these standards: the states or the local schools themselves?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
States	47	47	48	49
Local schools	29	28	30	32
Both*	15	13	18	14
Don't know	9	12	4	5

*Those who said "both" volunteered that answer.

The third question:

About 10 years ago a new federal Department of Education was established. The present Administration says that such a department is not needed and that its functions should be performed by a smaller agency or by other departments of the government. Do you agree or disagree with this view?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Agree	39	37	42	47
Disagree	37	36	40	37
Don't know	24	27	18	16

Tasks the Federal Government Should Undertake

In a related question, respondents were asked whether or not the federal government should undertake each of 11 different tasks that pertain to public education. Some eight of 10 Americans favored federal involvement in requiring state and local systems to meet minimum standards (84%), advising and encouraging state and local systems to deal with national problems (83%), identifying important national problems (81%), promoting educational programs intended to solve social problems (80%), and funding programs to deal with important national educational problems (78%).

Some seven of 10 Americans would favor federal efforts to recognize the achievement of students, teachers, and schools (76%), to support a national testing program for public school students (74%), to collect and report education statistics (73%), to fund research and development (72%), and to provide financing for fellowships and scholarships for college students (72%).

The question:

This card lists various things that the federal government in Washington might do for education in America. As I read off each item, would you tell me whether it is something that you think that the government should do, or should not do, for American education?

	Yes %	No %	Don't Know %
Require states and local school districts to meet minimum educational standards	84	10	6
Advise and encourage state and local educational systems to deal with important national problems in education, such as illiteracy and poor math achievement	83	10	7
Identify important national problems in education, such as illiteracy and poor math achievement	81	12	7
Promote educational programs intended to help solve such social problems as poverty and unequal opportunities for minorities, women, and the handicapped	80	12	8
Fund programs to deal with important national educational problems, such as illiteracy and poor math achievement	78	15	7
Provide recognition and awards for high achievement by students, teachers, and schools	76	17	7
Support a national testing program for public school students	74	17	9
Collect and report information and statistics that measure the performance of education in the nation	73	18	9
Fund research and development in areas of need, such as the curriculum and teaching methods	72	19	9
Provide financing for scholarships and fellowships for college students	72	20	8
Provide financial aid to the states through block grants that can be used for education or for any other purpose	57	30	13

Character Education in the Schools

Secretary of Education William Bennett has made character education one of his primary emphases. The respondents were asked whether they thought courses on personal values and ethical behavior should be taught in the public schools or left to parents and the churches. Forty-three percent said that such courses should be taught in the schools, and another 13% volunteered that schools, parents, and churches should all be involved.

The question:

It has been proposed that the public schools include courses on "character education" to help students develop personal values and ethical be-

havior. Do you think that courses on values and ethical behavior should be taught in the public schools, or do you think that this should be left to the students' parents and the churches?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes, schools	43	42	45	54
No, parents and churches	36	36	38	31
Both*	13	13	13	11
Don't know	8	9	4	4

*Those who said "both" volunteered that answer.

Content of Character Education Courses

All respondents were also asked: 1) whether it would be possible to develop character education courses acceptable to most of the people in their communities, 2) who should have the most to say about the content of such courses, and 3) whether those students who objected to the content of character education courses should be excused from attendance.

Six of 10 Americans (62%) think that it would be possible to develop subject matter for coursework on ethics and values that would be acceptable to most of the residents of their communities. Only about two of 10 (23%) feel that this would not be possible.

By a substantial margin, Americans feel that parents should have the most influence on the content of character education courses. Forty-two percent mentioned parents. The school board, mentioned by 24%, was the next most frequently mentioned group. Relatively far behind are teachers (14%) and administrators (10%). The state and federal governments are at the bottom, named by only 9% and 5% respectively.

By a margin of almost 5-3, respondents favored excusing students from character education classes if their parents object to what is taught.

The first question:

Do you think that it would be possible or not possible to develop subject matter for a character education course that would be acceptable to most of the people in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Possible	62	59	68	78
Not possible	23	24	22	17
Don't know	15	17	10	5

The second question:

If courses about values and ethical behavior were required in the local public schools, who do you think should have the most to say about the content of the courses? The federal government in Washington, the state government, the local school board, the school administrators, the teachers, or the parents?

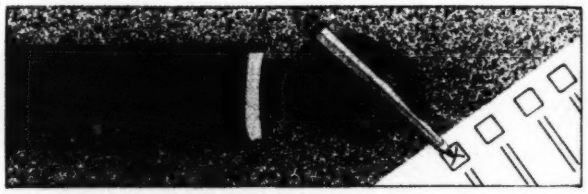
	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Parents	42	39	49	43
Local school board	24	24	24	30
Teachers	14	14	17	15
School administrators	10	11	8	7
State government	9	9	7	10
Federal government	5	5	5	6
Don't know	12	14	9	6

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

The third question:

If students or their parents objected to what was taught in these classes, do you think the students should be excused from these classes or not?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes, excused	52	49	57	62
No, not excused	37	37	37	32
Don't know	11	14	6	6



School Prayer

President Reagan has always been unequivocal in his advocacy of school prayer. So has the general public. Seventy-eight percent of the public are aware of the fact that an amendment to the U.S. Constitution has been proposed allowing school prayer. Within that group, 68% favor the amendment, and 26% oppose it. Almost three-fourths of the total sample (71%) feel that only a small percentage of the population would be offended by school prayer.

The first question:

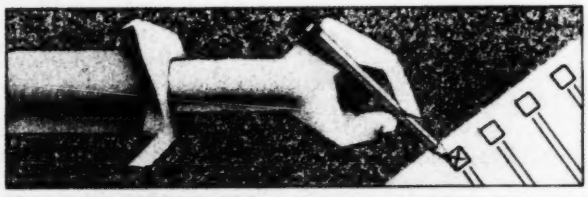
Do you favor or oppose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow prayer in the public schools?

Asked of those aware of the amendment	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	68	68	69	59
Oppose	26	26	26	35
Don't know	6	6	5	6

The second question:

Do you think that a small percentage or a large percentage of the public would be offended if prayer were permitted in the public schools?

	National Totals %	Those Who Favor Prayer %	Those Who Oppose Prayer %
Large percentage	18	12	35
Small percentage	71	78	53
Don't know	11	10	12



Grading the Public Schools

If more people feel that the public schools have improved over the past five years than feel they have gotten worse, that should be reflected in the public's ratings of the local schools. And it is. The percentage of the public who give the schools grades of A or B is up 2% in 1987, and the percentage who give the schools a grade of C or higher is up 4%.

As has been the case in past polls, parents are more likely to give the schools in their communities grades of A or B than are nonparents (56% to 39%). Those Americans who are most likely to give the schools high grades are the best-educated (i.e., college graduates) and those in higher income categories (more than $30,000 a year). Those least likely to award the local public schools high marks tend to be younger (under age 30), less affluent, residents of central cities, and nonwhite.

One troublesome note in these data is the negative correlation between the level of satisfaction with the public schools and already-evident demographic shifts of the next 25 years. That is, the population groups most likely to grow in the coming decades are those that are also most likely to express dissatisfaction with the public schools. This problem is exacerbated by the public's feeling that the reform movement has improved the schools *least* for students of below-average ability. Barring a change in one of these factors, it is reasonable to predict that the grading of the public schools will decline sometime in the 1990s.

The first question:

Students are often given the grades A,B,C,D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the *public* schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A,B,C,D, or FAIL?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	43	39	56	25
A	12	9	19	7
B	31	30	37	18
C	30	29	30	45
D	9	9	9	15
FAIL	4	4	3	8
Don't know	14	19	2	7

	A+B %	A %	B %	C %	D %	FAIL %	Don't Know %
NATIONAL TOTALS	43	12	31	30	9	4	14
Sex							
Men	42	12	30	34	9	3	12
Women	43	11	32	27	10	5	15
Race							
White	43	11	32	30	9	4	14
Nonwhite	35	14	21	34	11	8	12
Age							
18 - 29 years	36	8	28	34	12	4	14
30 - 49 years	44	13	31	33	10	5	8
50 and over	46	13	33	25	6	4	19
Community Size							
1 million and over	35	10	25	29	13	7	16
500,000 - 999,999	42	12	30	37	7	3	11
50,000 - 499,999	44	12	32	34	7	4	11
2,500 - 49,999	45	15	30	26	7	3	19
Under 2,500	53	13	40	28	7	2	10
Central city	28	7	21	39	14	6	13
Education							
College	46	11	35	30	10	3	11
Graduate	49	12	37	26	11	3	11
Incomplete	42	9	33	33	10	4	11
High school	40	11	29	32	9	5	14
Graduate	43	12	31	33	10	3	11
Incomplete	35	9	26	30	7	8	20
Grade school	40	19	21	22	6	6	26
Income							
$40,000 and over	48	13	35	29	10	4	9
$30,000 - $39,999	47	13	34	31	10	3	9
$20,000 - $29,999	45	12	33	31	7	5	12
$10,000 - $19,999	35	8	27	32	9	4	20
Under $10,000	45	16	29	24	10	3	18
Region							
East	39	11	28	29	11	6	15
Midwest	45	13	32	29	7	4	15
South	47	12	35	30	7	4	12
West	36	10	26	34	13	4	13

Respondents were also asked to grade separately the high schools and the elementary schools in their communities. High schools received markedly lower ratings than elementary schools. Forty percent of the public at large and 51% of respondents with children in the public schools awarded the high schools in their community a grade of A or B. The elementary schools received an A or B from 52% of the public at large and from a remarkable 70% of public school parents.

The second question:

How about the public *high schools* in this community? What grade would you give them?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	40	37	51	30
A	11	10	17	10
B	29	27	34	20
C	28	26	24	29
D	9	9	9	16
FAIL	4	4	3	10
Don't know	21	24	13	15

The third question:

How about the public *elementary schools* in this community? What grade would you give them?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	52	46	70	45
A	16	12	28	11
B	36	34	42	34
C	22	22	19	36
D	4	4	5	5
FAIL	3	2	1	6
Don't know	19	26	5	8

National Ratings

When the public is asked to grade the schools in the nation as a whole, the grades drop. Only about one-fourth (26%) of the public would give the schools nationally a grade of A or B; 70% would give them a grade of C or higher. As has been the case in previous polls, these ratings are sharply lower than the ratings of local public schools.

Once again, this year's survey found that the more familiar the grader is with a school, the higher the grade will tend to be. When parents are asked to grade the school their oldest child attends, 69% give that school an A or B. Only 30% of these same public school parents give an A or B to the schools nationwide. In the case of public schooling, familiarity breeds respect.

The first question:

How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally — A,B,C,D, or FAIL?

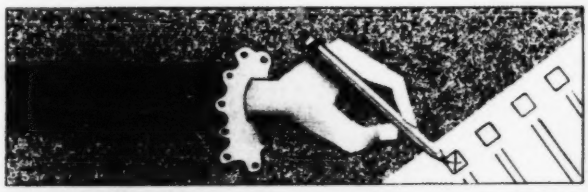
	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	26	26	30	17
A	4	3	7	4
B	22	23	23	13
C	44	44	42	59
D	11	9	14	12
FAIL	2	2	2	3
Don't know	17	19	12	9

The second question:

What grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	Total Public School Parents %	High School %	Elementary School %
A + B	69	66	74
A	28	21	33
B	41	45	41
C	20	26	17
D	5	4	6
FAIL	2	4	1
Don't know	4	*	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.



Grading School Personnel

Teachers in local public schools receive high grades; 49% of the public give teachers a grade of A or B, as they have in previous polls. Public school parents rate teachers even higher; nearly two-thirds (64%) give them grades of A or B.

For the second year in a row, the ratings given administrators lagged behind those given teachers; 43% of the public award public school administrators a grade of A or B. However, public school parents rated principals and other administrators much higher than they were rated by respondents with no children in school or by nonpublic school parents. Six of 10 public school parents graded principals A or B, while only about four of 10 other respondents did so.

Not surprisingly, the public grades the personnel in elementary schools more favorably than the personnel in high schools, just as it grades the elementary schools higher than the secondary schools. When respondents were asked to grade local teachers, the grades were lower for high school teachers (43% gave them grades of A or B) than for elementary school teachers (53% gave them grades of A or B). Similarly, the grades given high school principals were lower (38% A or B) than those given elementary school principals (47% A or B).

The first question:

What grade would you give the teachers in the public schools in this community — A,B,C,D, or FAIL?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	49	44	64	44
A	15	12	24	12
B	34	32	40	32
C	25	25	25	31
D	6	5	7	9
FAIL	3	3	2	5
Don't know	17	23	2	11

The second question:

What grade would you give the principals and administrators in the public schools in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	43	37	59	37
A	14	10	23	11
B	29	27	36	26
C	27	27	25	29
D	9	8	8	13
FAIL	3	3	4	8
Don't know	18	25	4	13

High School vs. Elementary School

The first question:

How about the local public *high school* teachers?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	43	40	51	39
A	12	10	17	11
B	31	30	34	28
C	24	24	24	26
D	8	8	8	14
FAIL	3	3	2	4
Don't know	22	25	15	17

The second question:

How about the local *elementary school* teachers?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	53	47	71	51
A	18	14	30	14
B	35	33	41	37
C	21	21	17	29
D	4	4	5	8
FAIL	2	2	1	3
Don't know	20	26	6	9

The third question:

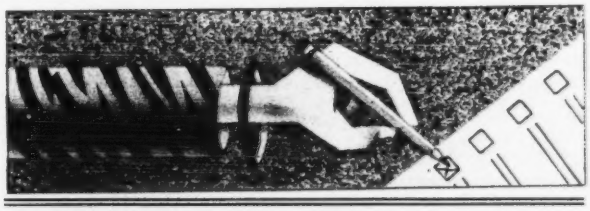
How about the local public *high school* principals and administrators?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	38	36	46	33
A	11	10	15	9
B	27	26	31	24
C	24	24	22	28
D	9	8	11	15
FAIL	5	5	4	8
Don't know	24	27	17	16

The fourth question:

How about the local *elementary school* principals and administrators?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A + B	47	40	63	46
A	15	11	26	14
B	32	29	37	32
C	23	24	21	32
D	6	5	6	7
FAIL	2	2	2	4
Don't know	22	29	8	11



Liberal Arts Degrees for Teachers

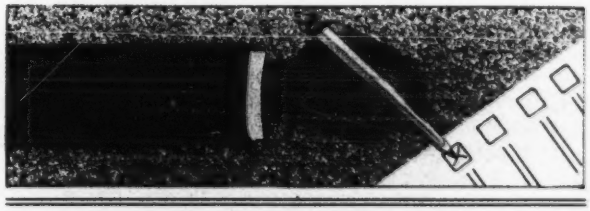
Despite the relatively high grades given to teachers by the American public, the 1987 survey still shows a demand for higher standards and requirements for teaching personnel. In the 1986 poll, 85% of the public favored requiring experienced teachers to pass a statewide test of basic competence in their subject areas. Three previous education polls showed across-the-board support for teacher competency testing.

This year the public was asked whether or not a prospective teacher should be required to have a four-year liberal arts degree with a *subject-matter major* before entering a teacher training program. This requirement, which has been advocated by two major reform groups in teacher education (the Carnegie Forum on Teaching and the Holmes Group), is favored by 72% of the public. Only 17% oppose it.

The question:

A recommendation has been made that anyone who wants to become a public school teacher must have a four-year liberal arts degree with a major in some subject before he or she can enter any teacher training program. Do you favor or oppose this recommendation?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	72	70	76	75
Oppose	17	16	19	19
Don't know	11	14	5	6



Support for Sex Education

Although the results of the 1987 Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa survey show no statistically significant increase over the past two years in support for sex education, a substantial increase in the percentage of those favoring sex education has been recorded since the question was first asked in 1981. In that year, the inclusion of sex education in the public school curriculum was favored by a substantial majority

(70%) for high school students and by less than a majority (45%) for elementary students. Today, 76% of the public favor sex education for high school students, and 55% support sex education in elementary school.

The first question:

Do you feel that the public high schools should or should not include sex education in their instructional program?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	76	73	82	81
Should not	16	16	14	18
Don't know	8	11	4	1

The second question:

Do you feel that the public elementary schools should or should not include sex education in grades 4 through 8?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	55	52	60	69
Should not	37	38	35	29
Don't know	8	10	5	2

Topics to Be Covered in Sex Education

As for specific topics that should be covered in sex education, somewhat more liberal attitudes appear to prevail in 1987 than was the case in 1981. Approximately 4% more of the public find coverage of the seven topics selected for evaluation acceptable today than in 1981 — both for high school students and for elementary students.

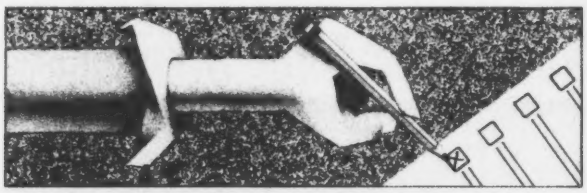
Large differences emerge between those topics that are acceptable in high school and those that are acceptable in elementary school. The two exceptions to this rule are the biology of reproduction and teenage pregnancy, which more than eight of 10 Americans feel should be covered in both the elementary schools and the high schools. Eight of 10 Americans think venereal disease, AIDS, and birth control should be covered in high school classes, but only about half would include these topics in the elementary school curriculum. A distinct minority would include the topics of homosexuality, premarital sex, abortion, and the nature of sexual intercourse at the elementary level — a figure that has not increased since 1981.

The question:

Which of the following topics, if any, listed on this card should be included in sex education in high school? In elementary school?

	Topics That Should Be Included In High School			In Elementary School		
	1987 %	1985 %	1981 %	1987 %	1985 %	1981 %
AIDS*	84	—	—	58	—	—
Birth control	83	85	79	49	48	45
Venereal disease	86	84	84	59	49	52
Biology of reproduction	80	82	77	82	89	83
Premarital sex	66	62	60	37	34	40
Nature of sexual intercourse	61	61	53	41	45	36
Abortion	60	60	54	28	28	26
Homosexuality	56	48	45	30	28	33
Teen pregnancy*	84	—	—	87	—	—

*These topics were not included in the earlier surveys.
(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)



Most Important Problems Facing Local Public Schools in 1987

In 1986, for the first time, the public identified drug use (or abuse) as the most important problem facing the public schools. This year, drug use was again the number-one concern, and the percentage of the public mentioning it increased from 28% to 30%. Four other problems increased by 3% each in frequency from 1986 to 1987: lack of proper financial support, 11% to 14%; difficulty in getting good teachers, 6% to 9%; large schools/overcrowding, 5% to 8%; and pupils' lack of interest/truancy, 3% to 6%.

Lack of discipline was cited by 22% of the respondents and remained the number-two problem with which Americans feel the public schools must deal.

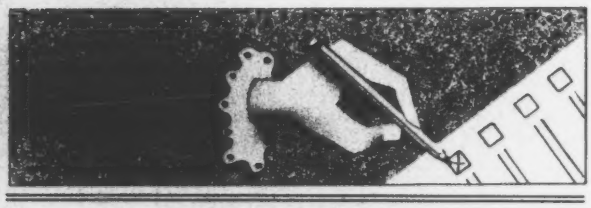
The question:

What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Use of drugs	30	31	29	27
Lack of discipline	22	22	20	28
Lack of proper financial support	14	12	18	14
Difficulty in getting good teachers	9	9	10	9
Poor curriculum/poor standards	8	7	10	9
Large schools/ overcrowding	8	7	10	5
Moral standards	7	7	6	9
Parents' lack of interest	6	6	6	11
Pupils' lack of interest/truancy	6	7	5	4
Drinking/alcoholism	6	6	7	4
Teachers' lack of interest	5	4	7	12
Low teacher pay	5	4	5	9

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Lack of respect for teachers/other students	4	4	5	8
Integration/busing	4	4	4	3
Crime/vandalism	3	4	2	5
Problems with administration	2	2	3	7
Lack of needed teachers	2	2	3	1
Lack of proper facilities	2	2	1	3
Transportation	1	1	2	*
Fighting	1	1	1	*
Too much emphasis on sports	1	1	1	*
Communication problems	1	1	1	*
Peer pressure	1	1	1	1
Mismanagement of funds/programs	1	1	1	1
Parents' involvement in school activities	1	1	*	*
School board politics	1	1	1	*
Too many schools/ declining enrollment	1	1	1	1
There are no problems	2	2	4	1
Miscellaneous	7	6	11	6
Don't know	14	17	7	8

*Less than one-half of 1%.
(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)



The Public's Knowledge of Local Schools

The public was asked to appraise its own knowledge of local schools, and the results are troubling. Only 15% of the American public feel well-informed about local schools. Among public school parents this percentage rises to only 25%. Most disturbing is the fact that a majority of those without children in school (55%) either asserted they are not well-informed or said that they "don't know." In contrast, fewer than one-fourth of the public school parents said they are *not* well-informed.

Responses were roughly the same when parents were asked about the information they had regarding the advantages and disadvantages of local schools and about the local school curriculum. In both instances, approximately one-fourth of public school parents admitted to little knowledge. If parents are to make informed choices about the schools that their children will attend (and both the public and Secretary Bennett endorse giving them that choice), then they will need to be better-informed about schools and curricula. Only 21% of the parents felt well-informed about the relative advantages of local schools; 26% rated themselves as well-informed on the curriculum.

The first question:

Would you say that you are well-informed, fairly well-informed, or not well-informed about the local public school situation?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Well-informed	15	12	25	18
Fairly well-informed	39	33	51	47
Not well-informed	41	48	23	34
Don't know	5	7	1	3

The second question:

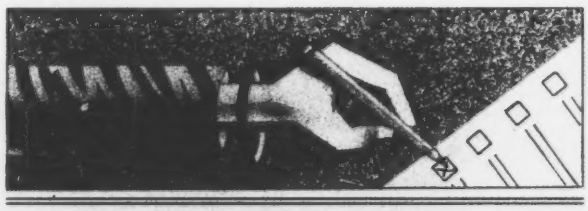
Would you say that you are well-informed, fairly well-informed, or not well-informed about the advantages and disadvantages of the various local public schools?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Well-informed	14	11	21	22
Fairly well-informed	36	30	51	41
Not well-informed	44	51	25	32
Don't know	6	8	3	5

The third question:

Would you say that you are well-informed, fairly well-informed, or not well-informed about what is being taught, what should be taught, or what should *not* be taught in the local public schools?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Well-informed	15	10	26	19
Fairly well-informed	36	32	48	41
Not well-informed	43	50	24	37
Don't know	6	8	2	3



The Public's Knowledge of Issues in Education

Few policy issues in education are likely to force their way onto the front pages of newspapers. When 13 education issues were presented to public school parents who were then asked if they had heard or read *something* about them, only six issues were checked by more than half of the respondents.

Some items considered critical by the makers of education policy are barely visible to the general public. For exam-

ple, only one in five people had heard about the introduction of character education courses in the public schools; only about one in four knew of the national achievement awards programs for students and schools or about voucher plans; roughly four of 10 had heard about efforts to transfer authority from the federal government to the states, to increase the number of required courses in school, to teach about the role of religion in this country and the world, or to foster parental choice of the schools their children attend. On the other end of the scale, three-fourths of the public school parents had heard about sex education and about efforts to introduce organized prayer in the schools.

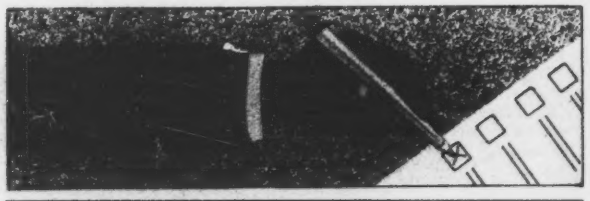
What the people have heard about and what they are concerned about are not always the same. People are concerned about sex education (27%) and prayer in the schools (25%). But they are also concerned about voucher plans (24%), the transfer of authority to the states (19%), and parental choice of children's schools (23%) — all issues about which the majority claims to have heard or read nothing.

The question:

This card lists various issues related to public education in this country that have been discussed in the news recently. Would you read off, by letter, all of those issues, if any, that you have heard or read something about?

Which of these issues worry or concern you?

	Public School Parents	
	Heard or Read About %	Worried or Concerned About %
Requiring sex education in the public schools	76	27
Permitting organized prayer in public schools	73	25
Requiring higher standards in the public schools	60	14
Recent efforts by the state government to improve public school education	59	15
Recent efforts by the federal government to improve public school education	53	14
Requiring higher achievement of public school students	52	14
Increasing the number of required courses in school and reducing the number of electives	40	14
Permitting parents more say about which local school their children attend	40	23
Teaching about the role played by religion in the history of this country and the world	38	17
Transferring the authority and responsibility for public education from the federal government to the state governments	36	19
Establishing national awards for high-performing public schools and for high-achieving public school students	28	11
Proposals to provide school vouchers to public school parents that could be used for any public, private, or church-related school	27	24
Introducing required courses in character education to develop personal values and ethical behavior	19	17



Research Procedure

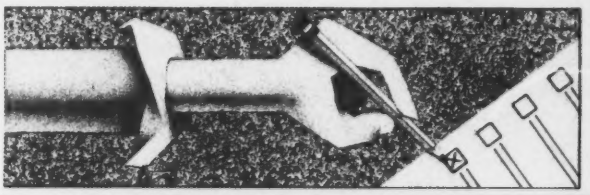
The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,571 adults (18 years of age and older). It is described as a modified probability sample of the U.S. population. Personal, in-home interviewing was conducted in all areas of the nation and in all types of communities. A description of the sample and sample design is available from Phi Delta Kappa.

Time of Interviewing. The fieldwork for this study was carried out during the period of 10-13 April 1987.

The Report. The heading "Nonpublic School Parents" consists of parents of students who attend parochial schools and parents of students who attend private or independent schools.

Due allowance must be made for statistical variation, especially in the case of findings for groups consisting of relatively few respondents, e.g., nonpublic school parents.

The findings of this report apply only to the U.S. as a whole and not to individual communities. Local surveys, using the same questions, can be conducted to determine how local areas compare with the national norm.



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